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Finding a Place for Breton in 21st-Century French Society

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Finding a Place for Breton in 21st-Century French Society

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Recent census data have shown that the number of Breton speakers in Lower Brittany has continued to drop despite revitalization efforts. A problem minority languages face is struggling to maintain a place in the lives of the people who have adopted the dominant language. In this study, I assess the current problems faced by the Breton language today by examining a few select problems. First, I highlight the lack of situations in which speakers can use Breton. Even children attending immersion programs often do not live in a Breton-speaking household, nor do they have settings outside the school where they can practice the language. Secondly, I consider the ideological place of Breton in the minds of speakers. Many people feel that while Breton is important to their heritage, they do not need to actively speak it in order to associate with a Breton identity. Related to this is the opinion of many people that Breton is an outdated language with no future ahead of it, as revealed by recent research (Broudic 2009, Jones1998, Timm 2001). Finally, the creation of a new, standardized Breton known as neo-Breton adds to the problem of finding a place for the language; older speakers who use traditional Breton are marginalized, while it is the young speakers using neo-Breton. I use current census data as well as personal research conducted in Brittany in July 2010 to supplement my assessment of the current Breton situation. While progress has been slow, Breton is gaining a stronger presence in society.

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Creating a Place for Breton in 21st-Century French Society

0. Introduction

The Breton language spoken in the Western half of Brittany, France, is one of many of France's regional languages that has lost a significant number of speakers over the years due to the centralized French state and the promotion of French as the nation's single official language. However, due to revitalization efforts in recent years, the number of children being educated in bilingual Breton/French programs is slowly growing. As of 2006, around 11,000 students had been educated in Breton programs (Broudic 2009: 63), and as of the summer of 2010 the number has increased to about 13,000[1]. While this may seem to be a positive sign of growth, a large percentage of the population in Brittany does not speak Breton. Only 13% of the population of Lower Brittany spoke Breton as of a 2007 census (Broudic 2009: 61). Even children who go to school to learn Breton find themselves with limited places outside the classroom where they can use it. Furthermore, research on speaker attitudes has shown that many people are not learning Breton because they do not see it as an integral part of their cultural identity (Jones 1998, Timm 2001). Most Bretons simply choose to speak French and feel no conflict with speaking French and being Breton.

[1] This is the figure given to me by an employee of the Ofis ar Brezhoneg (Office of the Breton Language) during an interview I conducted there in July 2010.

A common problem all endangered languages face is the problem of finding their place in relation to the dominant language that has overpowered them. The dominant language tends to invade the space of the minority language in terms of limiting the number of settings in which the minority language can be used, which is in turn related to the fact that many people feel that the minority language is no longer necessary in their daily lives. While book clubs, *centres de loisirs*, and summer immersion camps do exist for Breton speakers, they are neither numerous nor well-distributed throughout Brittany. Furthermore, some Breton citizens only relate the language to the days of their grandparents and do not see it as a language they can use in their own lives. Finding a sense of place is problematic for a minority language precisely because it is no longer used as it once was and is perceived as being out of place in a modern world with concepts (such as technology) for which it lacks the terminology and must either coin or borrow it from the dominant language. The minority language must be redefined and re-established as a modern, living language.

This paper seeks to explore the place of Breton in 21st-century society. With French having taken over as the dominant language, the difficulty of finding a place for Breton lies in the fact that it must be created. Such a place cannot be assured for Breton unless speakers and activists make a conscious effort to defend it. Breton must be a visible presence in society so that speakers can see it as a living language. It is exactly this place that language activists are trying to create, and it is often one of the most difficult tasks of language revitalization. Making the minority language feel like a natural

part of society rather than an artificial one is a delicate problem, but as the speaker base grows the language can once again become integrated into society.

There are successful instances of revitalization where the minority language has regained a place in society. The Welsh language has undergone a fruitful revitalization, and all children now take Welsh language courses as part of their education. Over time, a significant portion of the population has become proficient in Welsh. The "success story" of Welsh will be discussed in more detail throughout this study, as it often serves as an example for those involved in the Breton revitalization movement since they are close linguistic relatives.

This study is laid out as follows: section 1 gives a brief history of Breton and traces the loss of its speakers. Section 2 examines the physical place of Breton, not only the classes, cultural centers, and other resources available to speakers, but the all-important extracurricular activities where speakers might have a chance to integrate Breton into their daily reality. Section 3 considers the figurative, or ideological place for Breton. It first discusses the problematic image that Breton, like any endangered language, faces: the "outdated language" image, which implies that there is no longer any use for it. This study incorporates various micro-studies (Jones 1998, Timm 2001), which reflect speakers' perceptions of Breton in relation to their identity. A recurring pattern found from such studies is that many Breton people do not consider the language as an integral part of their identity. In other words, a strong Breton identity does not have to include the Breton language, furthering the problematic issue of finding a place for the language, because if one's identity can be conceived in French alone, why would he be

motivated to learn Breton? Section 4 gives necessary attention to neo-Breton. We cannot speak of finding Breton a place without mentioning that this standardized version of the language is the one being learned in the *diwan* schools[2] and spoken on TV. It is this version of the language that is most likely to persist and assure Breton a place in the future. Throughout this study, data from the most recent census conducted by Fañch Broudic (2009) are consulted to either find validity for or to question the language revitalization efforts under consideration here. Findings from my own personal research conducted in Brittany in the summer of 2010 are also included, as they provide up-to-date information on the current situation of the Breton revitalization.

Current studies are constantly needed to track the progress of the fragile situation of endangered languages. This paper seeks to add to the scholarship on Breton by questioning both the physical and ideological place of Breton in the eyes of not only scholars and language activists, but in the eyes of Breton people living their daily lives. What is the reality of this small language spoken in a small corner of the world, in a country whose government gives minimal recognition to its own linguistic diversity? Such a question is an essential one to ask, for it can help determine what the fate of the Breton language may be and what might be done to assure Breton a place in the future.

[2]*Diwan* are immersion schools for young kids in Brittany. The first one was founded in 1977, and new schools continue to be opened each year. *Diwan* is a Breton word meaning "sprout." The model of the *diwan* schools were the Basque immersion schools that first offered language courses for children.

1. A brief history of Breton

While the history of Breton is by no means the focus of this study, a brief overview of its history will provide helpful background information in which to situate its current state. No study of a threatened language is complete without understanding how it came to be threatened in the first place. Examining its past is helpful to assessing its present state and future possibilities. I will give a brief timeline below in Table 1 so that the reader can situate some major historical events and periods that affected the Breton language.

Table (1) Timeline of Historical Events Affecting Breton

1532: Brittany annexed to France (until this point, it had been an autonomous duchy) **1789:** The French Revolution, which had as a result the abolishment of Brittany as an independent state **1793**: Law passed requiring a French-speaking state-run school in every *commune* (Jones 1998:118) **1850-1873**: Industrialization period in France that led to many Breton people going to Paris for jobs, and improved transportation into Brittany made it less physically isolated from the rest of France (Timm 1973) **1886**: Free and obligatory education imposed (in French) **1914-1918**: WWI—soldiers from the various regions of France were forced to speak French if they wanted to communicate **1945:** Post- WWII: 245,000 Breton soldiers died. This is one Breton man for every 4 Frenchmen (Slone 1989: 227-8) **1951**: The Deixonne Law, which allowed the option of teaching some regional languages in school **1977**: Formation of the *Diwan* schools (Breton-speaking immersion schools) **1981**: Creation of the *License* (college degree comparable to U.S. Bachelor's) in Breton at the University of Rennes (Timm 2003:40) **1999**: Creation of the Ofis ar Brezhoneg (Office of the Breton Language) and DAO (organization for adult education)

This table is simply meant to give the reader an idea of what some of the influences on Breton have been. A combination of legislation, industrialization and globalization have all contributed to the decay of Breton, and it was not until the 1970's when measures to restore the language and promote a positive image of it were taken. I speak of positive image due to the fact that all of France's languages were not only repressed at one time in the educational system, but their speakers were also subject to widespread abusive treatment and outright hatred. Scholars often cite the statement made by A. de Monzie, Minister of National Education in France, who said in 1927, *Pour l'unité linguistique de la France, la langue bretonne doit disparaître*. (For the linguistic unity of France, the Breton language must disappear.) (Jones 1998, Kuter 1989). During my own visit to Brittany, every Breton person I spoke with, young or old, knows firsthand or has heard of a time when posters were hung in schools with notices to the students such as *Il est interdit de cracher par terre et de parler breton* (It is forbidden to spit on the ground or to speak Breton)[3]. Teachers were instructed to be harsh towards students caught speaking Breton in the classroom, often resulting in humiliating punishment.

To this day, many members of the older generation have internalized the notion that the language they speak is ugly and useless (Timm 2003:45), and they choose not to speak Breton. As an employee of the Ofis ar Brezhoneg (Office of the Breton Language) mentioned during an interview I conducted in the summer of 2010, *c'était non seulement*

[3] See for example http://ouiaubreton.plefeuvre.net/spip.php?article3027, which is a webpage of the "Yes to Breton" charter created by the Ofis ar Brezhoneg. There is a photo of the actual poster on this website related to an exposition that took place in Quimper in November 2010.

une mise en question de la langue, mais une mise en question de la personne (it was not only a questioning of one's language, but a question of the person [himself]). In other words, internalizing the notion that one's language is useless causes a person to doubt his own worth as a human being. Part of the reason that older native speakers of Breton do not actively participate in the language revitalization may arise from their sense of linguistic insecurity. Most teachers and language activists are young to mid-aged adults who have learned Breton later in life as a second language.

As a complementing timeline to the historical aspect, we should also consider the rate of decay of Breton over the years, for it has undergone an alarming drop in the number of speakers in less than a century. Here is a brief glimpse of what has happened to the number of speakers in the 20th-21st centuries:

Table (2) Timeline of the Decay of Breton

1925: 1,000,000 daily Breton users according to the Breton publication *Gwalarn*
1942: 800,000 daily users according to Gourvil's survey (Timm 1973)
1983: 300,000 daily active Breton users according to LeRoy; Delsol estimates 350,000 (Ager 1990: 71)
1997: 257,000 speakers according to Broudic's survey (2009: 40)
2007: 200,000 speakers according to Broudic's newest findings (2009: 64)

The critical period of decline seems to be between 1942 and 1983, which corresponds to two generations of parents who stopped transmitting Breton to their children. Once this shift occurred, it created a society in which children no longer grew up with any knowledge of the Breton language. This constitutes major, but hopefully not irreparable, damage that happens to many endangered languages. Part of the reason parents chose not to transmit Breton in the home is due to the stigma attached to Breton: the language of the backward country folk and the poorly-educated, while French

represented success and glamour (Kuter 1989). As French continued to take over all aspects of Breton society, the need to use Breton every day became less and less pressing and is now at the point where many people barely speak it in their everyday lives.

Breton is only one of many minority languages in France that is struggling to maintain speakers and promote the language through locally-funded revitalization efforts. The French government, which to this day has not ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, offers very little funding to the revitalization of minority languages. In fact, not a single one of France's regional languages has legal recognition. The notion of speaking French to the French identity is integral, and linguistic diversity has often been perceived as a threat to this unified identity (Kuter 1989, 77-78). In the quote above by the Minister of Education, note that the destruction of the Breton language was for the sake of the "linguistic unity of France". This is partially why language revitalization in France can be problematic and more slow-moving than movements in other countries. The Basque language, for example, is faring far better on the Spanish side of its border than on the French side (Azurmendi & Martínez 2005). This insistence on linguistic unity is an important backdrop with which to approach and better understand the revitalization of any of France's languages.

Breton has gone from being intentionally repressed to simply falling out of usage, since so many people adopted French (sometimes by force and sometimes by choice). Once the society has reached the point where French became the daily language of everyone, Breton lost its hold very quickly. Even though the revitalization movement has encouraged some people to learn the language and keep it alive, the situations where they

can actually use the language are relatively scarce. This study will examine what is being done to increase the presence of Breton in society.

2. The presence of Breton in society

Since the dominant language tends to overtake the minority language to the point that families often adopt it over their ancestral tongue, creating a need for the minority language must be a deliberate effort. It is often a slow and difficult process when a population is accustomed to, and often quite comfortable with, a society which functions wholly in the dominant language. Even though Breton is no longer overtly rejected as it was in one period of history and people are allowed to speak it, this does not mean that it will quickly regain its former range of uses.

In Joshua Fishman's well-known work *Reversing Language Shift*, the language functionality model is a key component we can use for the case of Breton. Fishman (2001: 10) assigns functions to languages, which he labels P and n-P: P functions are "high" functions such as government, education and media, while n-P functions are "low" functions such as family and community settings. This model is predicated on the H and L languages of the diglossia model wherein the "high" language is that used in government, media and literature, whereas the "low" language is the one used in family and community settings (Ferguson 1959). However, what often happens is that the H language invades the functions of the L language rather than the two staying separate. What Fishman argues is that the threatened language must have some domains of use in which it functions to the exclusion of the dominant language. A minority language is in particular danger when the dominant language has invaded the n-P functions where it was formerly used.

According to Fañch Broudic's most recent census data, it appears that Breton speakers often find themselves in situations where they can just as easily use French, and often do: 81% of proficient speakers (of which there are barely 200,000) claim to use French more often than Breton (Broudic 2009: 113). Also, the amount of Breton spoken at work, in interactions at the bank, or with community officials is continuing to drop (Broudic 2009: 119). While most Breton speakers use Breton in the family setting, there is still a large portion that does not speak it within the family because French has assumed the n-P functions as well, including the family setting. If Breton speakers are all bilingual (there are no monolingual Breton speakers left today) and they speak French at work, in commercial interactions, and possibly with a non-Breton speaking spouse, where are the situations where they can use Breton? In the rural areas, the *cafés de campagne* are "the last stronghold" of Breton-only settings, where older speakers assemble and speak Breton (Jones 1996: 58). These are cafes in the rural villages, where the retired, aging Breton speakers live. If one travels into the larger urban centers of Brittany, the cafes are unsurprisingly French-dominated.

Fishman claims that a few hours of school per day are not enough for children to learn a threatened language. Aside from needing parental transmission, which is hardly happening in Brittany—only 5% of Breton-speaking parents claimed to speak Breton "always or quite often" to their children (Broudic 2009: 117-118)—the child (and the family) needs a setting in which to practice the language where the dominant language is not present. As far as what these settings may be, Fishman suggests things such as cultural groups or after school activities for children (2001: 15).

Such resources, though not widespread, are available in Brittany. The KEAV (standing for *camp interceltique des bretonnants*), takes place every summer for a period of one to two weeks, wherein attendees do everything, from class to activities, from meals to songs, in Breton. This immersion camp gives *bretonnants* a chance to assemble and function in Breton. A visit to the camp in the summer of 2010 confirmed that while the number of attendees was relatively small (around 100), it was nonetheless a motivated group. During my morning stay at KEAV, I spoke individually with members of the teaching staff and observed the students interacting with one another and participating in group activities. No recording equipment was used so that I could observe the camp in the most natural way possible. Groups of children laughed and joked with one another in Breton, and not a word of French was once exchanged between a teacher and a student. The teaching staff explained the aims of the camp and their opinions on the best way of learning Breton. As mentioned, their technique is total immersion and their goal is to create a Breton-speaking community for children and their families. While small, this is perhaps a fairly strong network that could provide Breton speakers with a chance to use the language.

KEAV is one of many *associations* spread throughout Brittany that offers language courses for children and adults. I visited three sites involved in adult education in July of 2010: the cultural center *Amzer Nevez* in Ploemeur, the association *Roudour* in Carhaix, and the office of DAO (an adult education organization), also in Carhaix.

Amzer Nevez (whose name means “renewal” or “springtime”), in addition to language courses, offers Breton music and dance courses and has a library of Breton

materials. When I asked the librarian at *Amzer Nevez* what kinds of activities were available for Breton speakers, she mentioned that a few cities had *clubs des bretonnants* or reading clubs, but there was no organized system and not every town had such a group.

Roudour is one of 8 associations that offered a *stage* in Breton during the summer of 2010. During the year, *Roudour* offers everything from weekly courses to a 6-month *stage* that is paid by the region. Their goal is for those who complete the *stage* to leave with high communicative competency in Breton.

Sharing a building with *Roudour* in Carhaix is DAO, the adult education federation that unites 43 teaching associations. This new office (as of 1999) is evidence of the revitalization movement's growing organizational network. The DOA serves as the central source of information on the availability and location of adult Breton courses, and it is currently developing correspondence courses for those who might not have Breton courses in their town and it is currently participating with the Ofis ar Brezhoneg in a language campaign to stimulate interest in Breton courses. In July of 2010, employees of both organizations set out with boxes of posters to place in as many *communes* as possible with the message *Pour apprendre le breton avec plaisir* and a phone number which connects interested parties to the DAO office.

While I was unable to meet with anyone from the *diwan* schools during my July visit to Brittany, *diwan* is perhaps the most successful component of the revitalization movement. It is likely that *diwan,* along with the associations *Div Yezh* and *Dihun*, are responsible for the increase in the number of young Breton speakers. In Broudic's most recent census, he noted a 3% increase in the speakers of 15-19 year old age group from

1997 to 2007 (66). Over 3,000 students were enrolled in the *diwan* school system last year, and there are 44 schools in Brittany to date. Since the revitalization is not a government funded movement, these private schools rely on regional funding and parent donations. Language courses as well as general support are available for parents who do not speak Breton but who wish to participate in their child's education. As for the children themselves, they are immersed in Breton and learn French later in their education. English as a foreign language is also part of the curriculum.[4]

A recent and important addition to the revitalization movement is the Ofis ar Brezhoneg, founded in 1999, which oversees Breton in the public sphere. This office works to formulate new vocabulary for Breton (such as technological words), provides translation services, keeps up-to-date statistics on how many people are learning Breton, tracks how funds are distributed, and documents all place-names in Breton. One of the main missions of the Ofis ar Brezhoneg is to make Breton a more visible presence in society. As one employee mentioned during the interviews I conducted in the summer of 2010, Breton speakers will not understand that it is a living language unless they have a chance to see it in society, thus highlighting one of the office's major concerns. Each commune that signs the charter *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* (Yes to Breton) agrees to posting bilingual road signs and providing bilingual translations in public spaces. The importance of such linguistic landscapes is that the presence of language in signage impacts people's relationships to and interactions with it (Shohamy & Gorter 2008). Even the smallest details such as listing Breton first rather than French can have symbolic and visual impact

[4] All information regarding the *diwan* schools is available on their website, diwanbreizh.org.

on the viewer (Le Squère 2005). Posting bilingual road signs and bilingual translations in public is, for the Ofis ar Brezhoneg, part of their mission to make Breton a more visible presence for speakers.

However, we cannot speak of the presence of Breton in society without discussing the place of Breton in speakers' daily lives and identities. If speakers do not see Breton as worth learning and transmitting, the language will not have an assured future, despite the most valiant attempts by revitalists. Seeing bilingual road signs, for some residents of Brittany, is viewed as something of a "cultural gimmick" that tourists looking for an "authentic" Breton experience will enjoy seeing, but do not necessarily signify to speakers that Breton is alive and well. The problem is that all Breton speakers are by nature bilingual, and in fact most of them have learned Breton as their second language and do not require bilingual signs and Breton translations of menu items in restaurants. Such translations often feel contrived and artificial to speakers (Hornsby 2008).

Therefore in the next section, we must consider what residents of Brittany think about Breton. What kind of value to people accord to Breton? What kind of purpose does it serve to them? This is an examination that will be supplemented by previous micro-studies. Having a population base that believes firmly that their language, no matter how threatened, has a place in their lives, is the foundation on which to build physical places such as schools, cultural centers, and summer camps where the language can be used. The building of physical places for Breton, such as schools and cultural centers, cannot be accomplished without the language having a prominent ideological place in the minds of speakers.

3. The ideological place of Breton

In this section, we must consider how Breton is viewed, not from the perspective of a scholar or language activist who considers all minority languages worth saving, but from the perspective of people living in Brittany. Breton, like many endangered languages, is often seen as something of an artifact, a language associated with folklore and the traditions of one's grandparents. Convincing a population that this language can indeed be a living language is a difficult accomplishment for language activists. Another aspect that makes this attempt difficult is the fact that many people no longer feel that the Breton language is part of their identity. Many people, while expressing a strong affiliation with a Breton identity, do not see the language as a component of their identity. It has become a symbolically important language, but not one that they feel they need to actively speak.

3.1 Battling the "outdated language" image

Virtually all endangered languages suffer from the image of being a rustic or outdated language that represents the days of one's grandparents. The dominant language is very often viewed as the language of the present as well as the future, since speaking it assures success in the society. Even for those who might still speak the minority language, it is often in strictly reserved settings, and many non-speakers view it as a language that symbolizes the past along with traditional dances, songs and foods.

While language is a complex phenomenon that has many functions, we can identify two important functions for the purpose of this study. The first, essential function is communication. Human beings will use whichever language most assures than they can understand and be understood. A second function of language is a symbolic one; communication is not necessarily the driving factor behind using it here, but rather a desire to associate oneself with a certain culture or heritage (Jones 1998: 129). Breton, as we have seen, is evidently not a main tool of communication anymore, but what about its symbolic function?

Political activists and language activists have used Breton for years as a tool in their construction of a distinct Breton identity in direct opposition to the French identity, so this symbolic function is well known to them. As one of the teachers at the KEAV summer camp mentioned to me, he felt like he was part of a struggle, *un peu comme "cowboys and Indians"* (a little bit like cowboys and Indians). By referencing the cowboy and Indian imagery, he chose to define the relationship between Breton and French as a good versus bad power struggle. By speaking Breton, he placed himself in opposition to French, which he viewed as an oppressor. Language can therefore be an important symbol charged with meaning for some speakers, who feel that it plays a defining role in their identity. For the KEAV professor, speaking Breton was a means of not only having a Breton identity, but having such an identity in opposition to a French identity.

However, many of the citizens of Brittany feel a strong Breton identity and have positive feelings towards the language, and yet they do not choose to actively speak it.

The symbolic value of Breton, for many, does not go far beyond a mere appreciation of what the language means as a heritage marker. Speaker attitudes taken from various micro-studies have shown that the primary purpose of language as a communication tool is present in the minds of people. Responses such as the following are common: *Tu vas aller parler breton à Bruxelles?* (Are you going to go speak Breton in Brussels?) (Jones 1998: 138) Such responses imply that Breton is often not viewed as something a speaker could actually use in the world around him.

Broudic's data reflects such speaker attitudes found in the discussion above. While most speakers (89%) agreed that Breton should not be allowed to vanish, a smaller percentage (67%) believed that it would actually survive (Broudic 2009:149). When questioned further, many (29%) expressed that it was simply no longer a language of communication, but a language of the past without any future. In fact, the response "c'est inutile" (it it useless) was one of the answer options given to speakers in the questionnaire, and a considerable percentage of Breton speakers (35%) actually chose this response towards the language (Broudic 2009:158).

If a certain percentage of people feel that Breton needs to be preserved, then why is the same percentage not enrolled in language courses? There is something of a split between the admiration and respect for the language, and the willingness to actually learn it and participate in the revitalization. Perhaps this explains the existence of a kind of speaker Blanchet and Armstrong (2006: 254) call the "symbolic speaker," who feels a vague attachment to the language and what it represents but does not choose to actively speak it. Blanchet and Armstrong also note that the speaking populations all of France's

minority languages tend to be mainly symbolic speakers at this point. While it is encouraging to know that so many people feel that minority languages are important, a smaller number of them choose to learn and transmit the language, especially if they do not see it as a necessity.

Language activists, on the other hand, see the preservation of such languages as an urgent necessity, much like the KEAV teacher who compared the Breton/French situation to cowboys and Indians. Those fighting for the sake of a language are often highly educated people who have a particular interest in language. Compared to the general population, this is a relatively small group that has such a strong interest in language revitalization. Fishman, like many passionate revitalists, strives to combat the commonly espoused notion that an endangered language has no future before it. He comments in *Reversing Language Shift* that the endangered language of a society is an integral part of that people's culture and identity. He argues that if that language ceased to be spoken, the people in question would lose a part of who they really are. However, as the previous section has foreshadowed, this tight bond between language and culture might not be as strongly felt in Brittany as he deems necessary. It is this notion of the link between language and identity that is discussed in the next section.

3.2 The relationship between language and identity

Fishman (2001: 3-4) states that language and culture are tied together in a sacred bond, and that one's culture simply cannot be translated into a different language. This is

part of his reasoning for the necessity of Reversing Language Shift and saving even the smallest minority languages. However, not all Breton speakers feel a strong link between Breton culture and language, thus further weakening the motivation for maintaining the language.

In two different studies designed to elicit speakers' notions of what it is to be Breton, Timm (2001) and Jones (1998) both find that speaker ideas of Breton identity are complicated. For many, being Breton is simply identifying with a few stereotypical traits (rather exaggerated simplifications, such as being "close to nature" or being "stubborn"). Others associated it with living on Breton soil and attending Breton festivals (Timm 2001 :117). Many claimed that speaking Breton was not necessarily an essential component to feeling Breton. Simply feeling like they were part of a general culture of Breton people was sufficient for many speakers interviewed in these micro-studies.

The varying opinions on language and identity emerged during the course of the interviews I conducted in Brittany during July 2010. I met with a group of Breton musicians before their concert, and we discussed their music and what being Breton meant to them. The group EDF (Ewen Delahaye Favennec), named after its three members, sings songs in French, Breton, and English, though only one of them has any knowledge of Breton. When I asked them how they conceived of their Breton identity without speaking the language, one of them told me he felt very much like the Irish, many of whom have a strong cultural identity while speaking only English. Another musician noted that being Breton is something he feels, regardless of which language he speaks.

The opposite of this opinion was expressed by one of the teachers at KEAV that I spoke with. *Il manque quelque chose* (something is missing), she said in response to the comment I made that many Bretons do not feel like they need to speak the language to identify themselves as Breton. This teacher in particular saw the Breton language as an essential part of the Breton cultural identity, much like Fishman does. However, when it comes to personal feelings of culture and identity, opinions vary greatly and those who do not wish to learn Breton still associate with a Breton identity.

A second component of Breton identity is that many speakers identify with French language and culture and have no problem doing so. Speakers commonly state during interviews *mais on est français aussi*! (but we are French too! (Jones 1996: 63)). Their attitudes indicate that they have no opposition to being French while retaining an appreciation for being Breton. Jones (1998: 133) found similar attitudes in her micro-study of a single village in Lower Brittany. Furthermore, she notes that even before there was a strong sense of French nationalism in Brittany, there was no such thing as a unified "Breton" identity. The different dialects of Breton belonged historically to different locally affiliated tribes who wore different costumes, had different dances, and spoke slightly different forms of Breton. It was actually by defining themselves in opposition to the majority French that these Breton communities unified. Some speakers in Jones's study acted bewildered by the idea of a single Breton identity. This very notion, then, is semi-imaginary and constructed, often used as a means of putting oneself in opposition to a French-dominated nation. Furthermore, declaring that Breton language should go hand in hand with Breton identity is to forget the existence of another regional language in

Brittany, Gallo. Creating a linguistic pan-Breton identity is difficult when both Gallo and Breton are important local languages.

This question of language and identity is complex; however, a brief discussion of it is important to this study in order to show that for many speakers, Breton is not an essential component to their identity likely because the very notion of a definitive "Breton" identity is problematic.

3.3 The Welsh language: a comparison

The Welsh language, Breton's closest linguistic relative, is frequently mentioned as a model for the Breton revitalization, both by scholars and those working in the Breton movement. There are by far more children educated in Welsh language programs than there are in Breton, since education in Welsh is part of the national education system. Furthermore, Welsh enjoys a much stronger presence in society and is supported by more government funding than Breton. As the employee I spoke with from the Ofis ar Brezhoneg pointed out, the Welsh Language Office receives about 40 times more funding than the Breton Language Office. There is also a Welsh Language Board, whose aim is to represent the language as "a language for all" (Coupland et al. 2005: 18). In other words, Welsh activists are trying to present Welsh as a living, everyday language for its speakers.

The manner of representing a language is a deliberate choice that results from careful image planning (Ager 2005). Breton activists, too, seek to present Breton as a

living language that is capable of being used in modern society. Image planning is essential to minority languages that often suffer from the "outdated" image discussed earlier in this section, and presenting the minority language in a positive way can help dispel negative emotions about the language that previous generations may have had. Terms such as *cool Cymru* (cool Wales) suggest that the image of Welsh has become quite positive (Coupland and Aldridge 2009). The Welsh revitalization, which has moved more quickly than the Breton revitalization, has succeeded in making Welsh a part of society once again and developing a base of proficient speakers.

Although the Welsh movement has been successful, scholars are still studying the complexities of a bilingual society that has both a dominant language and a newly revitalized minority language at its disposal. In a study conducted by Coupland et al (2005), Welsh teenagers were quizzed about their Welsh proficiency, affiliation with Welsh identity, and use of the Welsh language. While it was certain that many students had high proficiency in Welsh and a strong affiliation with a Welsh identity in Coupland's study, their responses indicated that they largely viewed Welsh as a symbolic language. English was the response students gave as the language they used for primary communicative functions (Coupland 2005: 16). As discussed above, communication and symbol are only two of many functions of language. Naturally, it is Welsh, not English, that is the language associated with the "old" or traditional culture, and has strong associations with this culture, but that does not prevent Welsh speakers from using it in daily interactions.

Coupland's study might be of use in pondering the Breton question, because a symbolic or heritage language, while being recognized as one, can still become a language actively used in a society. Even if the teenagers in Coupland's study showed a preference for English as their main communicative language, the revitalization movement has still succeeded in producing young generations of bilinguals. Reducing language to communication versus symbol is an oversimplified view of a complex situation. The movement has done very well to create a community of proficient Welsh speakers who do use the language, and the Welsh situation is a model that many language activists in Brittany often refer to.

4. Neo-Breton

It is difficult to discuss the place of Breton without addressing the question "which Breton?" because the version of the language spoken by the older generations is not the Breton that will continue into the future. If the language is to be transmitted in the future, it will be the language that is known as neo-Breton. We can think of the Hebrew language as a useful parallel, which underwent updates and modernization and was re-introduced as a living tongue. Like many languages that fall into disuse and lose massive numbers of speakers (so many that it was referred to as a dead language), Hebrew underwent updates of vocabulary that allowed it to express modern concepts, and it eventually became the mother tongue of new generations of children (Fellman 1973). Similarly, Breton has language activists working to update its vocabulary. The Ofis ar Brezhoneg has compiled a database of modern terminology and Breton place names that gets consulted once every two minutes.

Many revitalization efforts struggle with finding a common version of the language to teach. As mentioned above, Breton speakers were for a long time locally oriented, speaking their particular dialect of the language and identifying with the local level rather than the regional level. Therefore the notion of a unified Breton language is a new one, a standard created by the work of grammarians. The term neo-Breton is often used disparagingly, as its speakers are said to lack any sort of "music" in their speech. Past scholarship has often focused on the problems with authenticity surrounding neo-Breton (Hornsby 2005, Timm 2001).

An unfortunate side effect of this standardized language is the gap between older and younger speakers and the hesitancy of older speakers to use Breton due to harsh memories of the past. They feel further confusion at hearing younger speakers using a type of Breton that does not sound natural to them. Rather than try to communicate in Breton, many older speakers simply switch over to French. This has been noted in past studies (Jones 1998), and a young Breton-speaking woman I interviewed in Carhaix in the summer of 2010 confirmed this in her own experience. She and her husband speak only Breton to one another and to their 2 young children, and she runs a website that sells books in Breton. When asked her how older speakers reacted to her when she addressed them in Breton, she noted *c'est comme s'ils ne voulaient pas comprendre. Ils me répondent en français* (it's as if they don't want to understand. They respond to me in French).

Older speakers of Breton are, in a way, placeless in the modern revitalization movement. The vast majority of teachers and language activists are younger to middle-aged people who learned Breton as a second language. All of the language activists I interviewed in July 2010 were second-language learners of Breton. However, they were conscious of the dialectal differences and made re-introducing an authentic Breton accent and word-level stress (which French lacks) a priority of their language courses. They all spoke of the *écrasement* of Breton as a side effect of needing to teach a common language yet acknowledged the need to retain dialectal variation. Some children learning Breton even have the opportunity to be taken to the homes of older speakers who are

willing to receive them and to have their names and address added to a directory of native speakers[5].

If, however, Breton will continue to be spoken in the future, it will be the version of the language as it is spoken by young people today, whether it is a "flattened" Breton or not. When the last older, traditional speaker dies, his or her version of Breton will disappear as well. Neo-Breton has, in effect, created a new identity, but it is not an identity that is more or less authentic than the identity of the traditional speakers. It is simply different. With the attempts at creating a place for Breton has come the creation of a new Breton language. Since Breton is in decline, the notion of a unified language and a unified effort at conserving it has called for the forming of a regional rather than local notion of a Breton-speaking movement.

[5] This is a common practice at the KEAV summer immersion camp; teachers feel that getting children out into the "real world" to interact with living Breton speakers is helpful to their linguistic advancement.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the creation of a place for Breton is a process that takes time. The language went from suppression, when French became the native language of several generations, to a period where it was once again acceptable and even encouraged by local movements. However, by this point a population of speakers with little daily experience of Breton (except for family gatherings where Breton-speaking grandparents were likely present) found themselves faced with a language whose only associations were with the past. For people in modern-day Brittany, French is the daily language, not Breton. It is natural, then, to sympathize with the "outdated language" attitude that many people might have. Breton will never return to the days of being the everyday language of society, especially if only a certain percentage of the population is learning and attempting to transmit it.

In many ways, the place of Breton for the moment is relegated to a limited number of circumstances where it is used by a motivated minority. However, this does not necessarily imply that the revitalization is not successful. As a teacher at the KEAV summer program emphasized to me, measuring the response to revitalization attempts is perhaps better looked at in terms of the quality of the response rather than the number of people responding. It must be remembered that the Breton movement is moving more slowly than the Welsh movement, largely due to the fact that it is locally and not nationally supported.

Perhaps rather than asking how many speakers constitute a successful revitalization, we ought to ask how strong the existing group of speakers is. Can a revitalized language persist in the hands of a small group of speakers? Will children raised in *Diwan* schools go on to speak Breton to their children? If so, how many native speakers of Breton will be born in coming generations? Will future speakers have places to speak Breton once they have been educated and have left school? Some may go on to be teachers of Breton or may work in a cultural office where the use of Breton is necessary. Perhaps others may go on to get a job that does not involve the language. When and where will they speak Breton, then? Will there be a development of more book club meetings, evening classes and other activities for speakers?

The revitalization movement still has progress to make. However, the presence of Breton is growing, as my summer visit to Brittany confirmed. More and more *diwan* schools are opening, the Ofis ar Brezhoneg moved from the private to the public sector in October 2010, and more and more *communes* are signing the *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* charter. The latest campaign between the Ofis ar Brezhoneg and DAO is spreading publicity about Breton courses all over the region. The movement is, fortunately, gaining momentum, and Breton is becoming a more and more visible presence in society. How will this translate into the daily lives of Breton citizens? Whether speakers will use Breton more, and whether increasing numbers of non-speakers will want to learn Breton, has yet to be determined.

However, the current passion of a motivated minority will assure the language's continuity as an important addition to the culture, adding richness and diversity, even if

the language is no longer an essential communication tool. Like Welsh, Breton is being reinvented and reintroduced into society, where it exists alongside the dominant language. This is perhaps why comparing its current situation to its former uses is not an effective way of measuring its progress. Breton is no longer the first and only language of a largely agricultural society. It is the language of a modernized and bilingual society. Bilingualism is a complicated issue because speakers have access to two languages that they use in various situations. Breton and Welsh, while seen as symbolic languages by some of their respective speakers, are still used as communication languages, whether at school or summer camps.

Like many minority languages, Breton has simply undergone changes. Even the demographics of Breton speakers have changed over the past century. The largest number of Breton/French bilingual-educated children is actually in Rennes, a city in the Gallo-speaking area of Brittany, not Brest, the largest city in the Breton-speaking region[6]. The language is learned by not only those living in the traditional Breton-speaking area, but even those from outside the area. As the teachers at the KEAV summer camp mentioned to me, people from Wales, Sweden, Japan, the Czech Republic, and other countries have come all the way to Brittany to learn Breton. In a modern society where people are increasingly mobile and have access to different cultures through travel and Internet, speaking Breton in addition to French is part of a multi-culturalism that should be viewed as nothing but positive and desirable.

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[6] I was informed of this fact during my interview at the Ofis ar Brezhoneg.

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